

## PLEXING QUESTION.

Board of Education Calls for a Meeting of the Board of Estimate to Discuss the Request of a Numberable School Teachers for Increased Salary—A Difficult and Dismal Matter.

Board of Education held a special meeting Tuesday night for the discussion of social matters connected with the town. It is understood that teachers was the principal feature of the discussion, and the Board has asked for a meeting of the Board of Estimate in order to lay before that body the problem now confronting the Board of Education. The Board of Estimate is made of members of the Board of Education and of the Town Council and the sum that should be put in the treasury for the support of the public schools.

The salaries paid to public school teachers in all grades in Chester New Jersey is much higher than in other towns adjacent to the city, and this is a strong element in the administration of public school affairs in every town within a radius of twenty-five miles of New York City, not excepting Newark and New York State towns, teachers, as a matter of course, at the New York City salaries with several pension provisions attached as standard, and as a consequence the drains on the surrounding territory by the Boards of Education, particularly in the smaller towns, had it difficult to retain teachers for any length of time.

Bloomfield is doubly handicapped in the matter of retaining teachers, due to the fact that its salary standard is lower yet than Newark, East Orange and Montclair, and upwards of 100 teachers have intimated to the Board of Education that they want increased salary to stay in the schools another year. This matter would probably not be so serious if it were not the financial condition of the town.

An exorbitant tax rate a year ago rise to a formidable movement in direction of annexation to Newark. Various efforts were made in every section to cut down public expenses for the express purpose of bringing in the tax rate and mollifying public dissatisfaction. The tax rate was mainly reduced, but some departments of government have suffered from the reduced economy. The Road Committee of the Council should have had the money for road repairs. The Fire Department is in bad shape for need of money to maintain the fire houses. Some of these matters will be urged on the Board of Estimate with equal force with the school question, and it is felt that if the Board must yield to all and increase public expenditure, a high tax rate will again disturb public quiet. With the prospect of having to issue a large amount of bonds for the purchase of a water plant and with having to assume a share of the Passaic River Valley sewer cost, if that gigantic project is carried through the outlook for increased salaries in any department of government is dubious.

## FACTS ABOUT THE WATER COMPANY.

The Orange Water Company has a franchise for furnishing water to this town for public purposes and domestic uses. None of the corporations holding town franchises has been the subject of so much absurd and ignorant talk as this particular company. People who have not possessed the least knowledge of facts have not hesitated to make the most astonishing assertions as to the profits of the company and the personnel of the stockholders.

It has been openly asserted that the contract between this town and the Orange Water Company was made at the instance of and through the influence of a number of leading citizens who held large blocks of the company's stock, and the alleged enormous profits of the company have been a favorite theme of a large number of citizens of popular political tendencies.

The affairs of the Orange Water Company have recently been thoroughly ventilated before a commission appointed by the court to determine an equitable value of the plant for the benefit of the city of East Orange, which contemplates purchasing it and putting in operation the plan of municipal ownership of the water supply.

The commissioners before whom the testimony was taken were Amos Dodd, William Clark and Eugene Lindabury. Both the city and company were represented by counsel before the commission, R. V. Lindabury appearing for the city and Joseph L. Munn for the company. The city went to great expense in securing so-called expert testimony as to the value of the plant. The company brought forward but one alleged expert.

One part of the testimony related to the profits to stockholders, and it was shown that in addition to the six per cent. dividend and interest payments made on stock and bond issues by the company every year since its organization twenty years ago, an extra dividend equal to 12 per cent. was paid on the stock in 1880. This consisted of the transfer to the stockholders individually of the Commonwealth building in East Orange, erected by the company from its earnings at a cost of \$117,000, and then turned over to the stockholders as individuals as a share of the profits of the company at a valuation of \$120,000.

The financial statement of the company submitted by Mr. Sheppard showed Capital stock, \$100,000; bonds, \$350,000, and other loans aggregating \$171,000, of which there is due Mrs. F. M. Sheppard \$128,000, F. M. Sheppard \$25,000, and Mrs. H. S. Randall \$1,000. Dividends of 6 per cent. per annum have been paid by the company on the stock each year since the organization, and 6 per cent. paid on the bonds and other loans. In 1880 the extra dividend, consisting of the Commonwealth building in East Orange, was given the stockholders. This was equivalent to an extra dividend of more than 100 per cent.

During the eighteen years from 1881 to 1900 inclusive, \$387,831.21 had been paid to the stockholders in interest, and \$217,147.91 to the stockholders in dividends. The surplus earnings over and above operating expenses, interest and dividends for the eighteen years were \$67,712.01.

The real estate owned by the company in the tract embracing the wells, comprising 153 acres of the company \$138,408.39. The East Orange water plant, including pipes, hydrants, house connections, pumps, boilers and wells, cost \$34,513.37. In addition \$161,710.66 was expended for the Bloomfield and Glen Ridge construction. The total payments for the plant, including the real estate, East Orange and Bloomfield construction, is put down at \$684,698.42, while the total stock and bond issue is \$621,000.

V. W. Voorhees, a real estate dealer of East Orange, testified before the commission that the real estate of the company, independent of the wells, comprising the 153 acres, was worth at the present time \$232,612 for building purposes. The calculation was made on the basis of present property values in the neighborhood.

The company stated that about twenty-seven acres of land, comprising that part on which the wells are located, in the middle of the tract, were taken by condemnation, and there was some question as to whether it would not revert to the original owners.

The testimony taken in this case is of value as material for argument pro and con over the question of the economy and utility of municipal ownership vs. private ownership.

The well-known civil engineer, Carroll P. Bassett, was the expert put forward by the water company. Mr. Bassett said regarding the samples of pipe taken from the street mains in East Orange, that they practically showed no deterioration. Mr. Bassett made a long argument, the purport of which was to show that the prospects of future business must be considered in determining the value of a water plant. He made comparison between conditions existing in Newark and East Orange. In Newark there was an average of 132 consumers per mile of street main, while in East Orange there were 82.7 consumers per mile. The number has grown from 71.5 per mile in 1896, which shows the development of the East Orange works. The question of the quality of water or where the water comes from did not, Mr. Bassett stated, make any difference;

## THE SCHOOLS AND TAXES.

### AN INCREASE OF SEVEN THOUSAND DOLLARS FOR SCHOOL PURPOSES ASKED FOR.

Effect of Such an Increase on the Tax Rate—Demand of Teachers for More Pay Held to be the Cause of the Need of More Money—The Town Not in a Position to Increase Expenditures for Schools or Any Other Purpose.

The Board of Education has asked for a special meeting of the Board of Estimate in order to have that body pass upon the school appropriation for the ensuing year. The School Board asks for an appropriation of \$40,500 for the coming year, which is an increase of \$7,000 over the current year's appropriation for schools.

Any action taken by the now constituted Board of Estimate with respect to appropriations either for schools or any other purpose would not be legally binding. The Council and the Board of Education that will be in power after the spring election will create a new board that will fix the appropriations for the various public expenditures to be made for the fiscal year that it is in power. No action of the present board would be binding on its successors, even if no change were made in the personnel of the Board of Estimate either by the Town Council or the Board of Education.

If the present Board of Estimate declined to approve of the increased appropriation asked for the Board of Education, even if deemed it policy to cut the appropriation below that of last year, the School Board would be acting within its legal rights by carrying the matter before the new and proper Board of Estimate that will exercise jurisdiction over appropriations for the next fiscal year.

The question arises, Why does the School Board ask for this early action in the matter of the school appropriation, and what reason is there for submitting the matter to a body that is not legally authorized to act upon it? Several answers suggest themselves, and one is that there is a reasonable probability that there will be no change in the personnel of the Board of Estimate between this year and next year, and if the present board approved of the increased appropriation for schools now, it would simply remain for it to formally ratify its present action when the proper time came.

Again it may be assumed that if the present board gave its approval to an increased appropriation for schools, and changes were made in the make-up of the new board, the action of the old one would have the effect of a precedent upon the new board, and it would not be likely to upset the work of its experienced predecessor.

Another reason for asking for immediate action in the school appropriation is a general demand for higher salaries on the part of the principals and vice-principals employed in the schools, and also the necessity for the employment of five new teachers on account of the increased enrollment in the schools.

The Board of Education's estimate of its financial needs for next year is as follows: For instruction, \$43,000, repairs, \$2,500; supplies, \$10,500; maintenance, \$5,000; manual training, \$2,500; total, \$63,500. These same items in last spring's estimate were: Instruction, \$38,000; buildings, \$3,000; supplies, \$11,000; maintenance, \$1,500; total, \$56,500.

The Board of Estimate was asked last year to appropriate \$33,500 of this amount, and the balance came from the State and other sources. This year the board is asked to put \$40,500 in the tax levy for school purposes.

The town of Bloomfield now possesses an extensive and well-appointed school system, consisting of seven schoolhouses, a teaching force of 62 teachers, and an enrollment of 2,122 pupils. A complete and efficient system of educational work is carried out, from kindergarten to high school. The average increase in the enrollment at the schools is nine per cent. This increase will be reached or exceeded this year.

The taxpayers of Bloomfield have not in the past been liberal in the support of the schools, and there has never been any question but what the school system has been economically congested.

An annual increase in the cost of school maintenance is a natural consequence. With the increase in pupils there must be an increase in the number of teachers. Aside from the question of an increase in the number of pupils and the need of more teachers, there are numerous other causes that tend to increase the cost of the public school system. More parents are now giving their children the advantage of the higher education in the schools than formerly. There is a popular demand for a broader and varied character of public school education that was carried out in times past.

The increased appropriation asked for

by the School Board is not an unreasonable one, and if conditions were favorable there is no question but what it would be readily sanctioned by public opinion and popular vote.

But the conditions are not favorable at the present time for an increased expenditure either for school purposes or any other public purposes. Bloomfield is financially a poor town. It has much territory, it is true, but the larger portion of it is unproductive of any great revenue to the town.

The tax rate of the current fiscal year, 2.90, was too high, and the policy of retrenchment should be still further pursued until the tax rate is brought down to less than 2.50, and no increase in expenditures should be sanctioned in any line until that much desired position is reached.

If the Town Council finds that it cannot carry out its present system of government without increased cost, let it retrace by combining offices and reducing salaries.

Kindergarten, music, dancing, manual training, physical culture and other extraneous features of common school educational work may be beneficial, but they are not essentials, and when it is found necessary to prune in order to keep down expenses, it is among the non-essentials that such work should be done.

The increased appropriation requested for school purposes, if granted, would mean an increase of not less than ten, or perhaps more than fourteen points in the tax rate, and would again bring about a three per cent. or higher tax rate. The returns obtainable from money invested in property here do not warrant such a high tax rate, and the general effect on the town is detrimental in many ways. It gives rise to much dissatisfaction and also to annexation projects and secession schemes, such as a borough government for Brookdale.

Bloomfield's growth in the number of its school children is proportionately greater than the increase in the financial resources of the town. The school enrollment increases on an average of nine per cent. annually; the increase in tax rates is less than four per cent. The average mechanic who comes from some other town to Bloomfield with his family, if he purchases or builds a home here, adds only one thousand dollars to the tax rates, and the probability is that he will send three or more children to the public schools at a cost to the general mass of taxpayers of thirty dollars per child, less the proportion of the school money paid by the State. In other words, the new comer contributes between twenty-five and thirty dollars to the town revenue, but on the other hand his children's school privileges cost the taxpayers at least forty dollars per annum. If the new comer simply rents rooms here the financial cost to the town is still greater.

The higher grades of public school education, and what some people call the "superfluities," are the most expensive features of the public school system, and one of the least interest to the larger proportion of parents. It may be lamentable that such is the case, but nevertheless it is true. Nearly two thousand children in the town attend the primary and grammar schools, but less than two hundred attend the High School. It is evident that if the town's public educational system was adjusted on the basis of the most needed benefit to the largest number of people much of the present educational work could be abandoned until such time as the town is in a better financial condition. And what is true of schools is equally true of every other department of government.

## A COLD WEEK.

The annual February cold snap arrived Tuesday night, accompanied by the heaviest snow storm of the season, and there has been some record-breaking weather during the week. On two nights the thermometer indicated zero, and in some parts of the town it was claimed that two points below zero were recorded.

The snowdrifts were not promptly put to work Tuesday morning, and Chairman Moore of the Sidewalk Committee was indignant at the delay in getting to work and issued peremptory orders to Superintendent Cooper. The latter put out extra help, and by Tuesday night all the sidewalks in the town were in good passable shape. The snow piled up in Bloomfield and Gladwood Avenues by the trolley company was removed by Superintendent Cooper. Trolley cars were not able to run on schedule time either on Tuesday or Wednesday, owing to the snow and ice.

## Quietly Squelched.

No action was taken by the Town Council Monday night in the matter of the request of Joseph Reinheimer for the transfer of a wholesale liquor license granted to him last July to John Putzkeoff of Second Street. Councilman Walker of the Second Ward said that no action would be taken by the Council in the case, and it is understood it has been quietly squelched.

## Fire Department Changes.

At the Town Council meeting Monday night the Fire Committee reported the application of Frank C. Becker of Phoenix Hose Company for a firemen's exemption certificate which was granted; also that of John Bailey of Excelsior Hose Company.

The resignation of Joseph Warden from active membership in Active Hose Company No. 2 was accepted.

Present sang "London's Burning," "Star Spangled Banner" and "Rally 'Round the Flag."

Our country is united to-day in ad-

London's burning, and the red, white and blue crept on their lips about two months.

Clinton Street, Bloomfield.—Add.

